Rising Gestures, Text Expression, and the Background as Theme

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Abstract:

Walter Everett's categories for tonal design features in nineteenth-century songs fit the framework of the Classic/Romantic dichotomy: eighteenth-century practice is the benchmark for progressive but conflicted alternatives. These categories are analogous to themes in literary interpretation; so understood, they suggest a broader range of options for the content of the background than the three Schenkerian Urlinien regarded as essentialized universals. The analysis of a Brahms song, "Über die See," Op. 69/7, provides a case study in one type, the rising line, and also the entry point for a critique of Everett's reliance on a self-contradictory attitude toward the Schenkerian historical narrative.

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Introduction

Walter Everett (2004) discusses in considerable detail ways in which the background shapes (especially the fundamental lines) of Schenkerian analysis may be related to specifics of text expression in nineteenth-century songs. He says that

> Most analysts who have examined experimental structures in nineteenth-century opera and song have focused primarily upon harmonic innovations . . . with surprisingly little attention paid to background voice-leading practice. Furthermore, few analysts have presented any discoveries relating to the deep-level expression of a poetic text. This essay aims to explore some of the ways in which a tonal system strong and vibrant enough to withstand the radical changes of the nineteenth century was also versatile enough to reflect new poetic ideas at deep structural levels in ways that Schenkerians have not explored in any systematic way (2004, 26).

Thus, the background forms that Schenker authorizes in *Free Composition* are set against a group of Others, which became part of the compositional toolbox in the course of the nineteenth century because they offered expressive possibilities so compelling that composers were willing to use them, despite their shortcomings as tonal models. Everett links this familiar opposition between "normative ideals" (29) and the Other not only to Romantic priorities but also to values of contemporary musical analysis:

> In some normally tonal Romantic vocal works the fundamental line is of relevance to interpretation only in that its highly suppressed status or its complete absence from the texture may illustrate a deviation from the norms. The main point of analysis, it seems to me, is to work through the tension between the peculiarities of a piece and its normative ideals. But in the nineteenth-century artwork, the occasionally insoluble nature of that tension should be allowed to override any plausible—but perhaps irrelevant—conventional solution (2004, 28-9).

As the basic construct that governs his analytical presentations, Everett sets up four categories of backgrounds, designated with capital letters A-D:

(A) "Normal fundamental line present in vocal, even if portions implied; may have coda";
(B) "Normal structural harmony would permit fundamental line, but vocal presents no A-type line";
(C) "Tonal harmonic appearance but structural V-I lacking";
(D) "No semblance of fundamental structure, or combination of fundamental structures in harmonically unrelated keys" (31).

The forms under categories B-D, which include incomplete or rising Urlinien and harmonic plans based on plagal or symmetrical progressions or on progessive tonality, cannot be proper Ursatz or Urlinie forms: by definition, only the three traditional forms of category A can populate the background (Schenker specifically designates the "fundamental structure as the

[only] content of the background" ([1935], 4)). These Others usurp the place of the fundamental structure, and yet composers succeed in constructing works that fulfil the conditions of the masterful musical composition.[1] Even so (and despite Everett's best efforts to assert the contrary), by the nature of the opposition such songs will always remain fragments: not necessarily the obvious Romantic shard[2] (such as the first song of Schumann's *Dichterliebe*) but conceptual fragments that might have been complete works "if only" the background had been treated in the conventional way.

Everett's account of changes in tonal design features in nineteenth-century songs fits the familiar framework of the Classic/Romantic dichotomy, in which an essentialized eighteenth-century practice becomes the benchmark for progressive but conflicted and potentially even self-destructive practices in the following century. In this essay I will use one of the constructs from his category B—the ascending Urlinie—to augment and clarify one part of that historical account: the Other forms were not only progressive, in the sense of developing directly out of eighteenth-century practice, but also far more common than Everett seems willing to allow. To integrate the Other forms more fully and to open up a broader range of options for the practice of linear analysis,[3] I will argue that, rather than regard the three Urlinie forms as essentialized universals and as the only content of the background, we should regard them as analogous to themes in mid-twentieth-century literary interpretation.

The self-critical employment of background-as-theme cannot resolve the gap between the Schenkerian historical narrative (which has an openly and strongly ideological slant) and the less sharply defined history commonly assumed by most classical music professionals, but it can prevent the ideological functions of the three Urlinien from becoming transparent, lost to view.

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[1] Charles J. Smith (1996, 263, 266) develops a similar extended list of Urlinie forms, although he divides them functionally (into forms for open or closed forms) rather than by class status, as Everett does.

[2] Justin London and Ronald Rodman (1998, 121) use this term as they tie their linear reading of an incomplete ("gapped") Urlinie to genre: they describe Chopin's E-minor Prelude as "a magnificently composed shard."

[3] I regard this as a desirable goal: "we need to have simultaneously a more complex and a more orderly sense of the transformation of motives in the composing-out process, as well as a wider range of background motivic 'models' to transform" (Neumeyer 1987, 301).

Part I: Rising cadence gestures in the nineteenth century

Cadences and the "consonant fourth"

The historical trajectory of the rising line is very similar to that of the cadential six-four chord a century earlier. The "consonant fourth" was a common deviation from the strictest treatment of dissonance in mid-sixteenth-century sacred vocal music: the perfect fourth—or, more commonly, a major or minor triad in six-four position—could serve as the preparation for a 4-3 suspension figure. This "consonant fourth" was always positioned on a weak beat (second or fourth in what we would understand as a 4/2 measure).

Although the six-four chord very occasionally was displaced to a strong beat (as, for example, in several repetitions of a prominent cadence in the chorus ending the Prologue to Lully's *Armide*), the consonant fourth construct was surprisingly stable throughout the seventeenth century, as can be seen in mm. 46, b2 and 48, b2 of Example 1, late instances from a *stile antico* fugue by J. K. F. Fischer, whose *Ariadne musica* was published in 1702. Two decades later, Italian opera composers (notably Alessandro Scarlatti and Leonardo Vinci) were routinely moving the six-four chord to an accented beat in a 3/4 or 3/8 measure, and in this form the chord quickly became a clichéd element of the so-called "galant cadence," the familiar formulaic perfect authentic cadence of the later eighteenth century.[4]

Echoes of the distinction remain late in the century, when Mozart calls the six-four "accordo di quarta consonante" and the older dissonant vertical that would occupy the same accented position in a cadence the "accordo di quarta dissonante" (see Example 2) (Heartz et al 1965, 21). In a related document ascribed to him, Mozart also contrasts the older cadence with a 4-3 suspension over the dominant to the cadential six-four: the former is "contrapunctisch," the latter "modern (gallant [sic])," the obvious implication being that the latter replaced the former in practice) (Heartz and Mann 1969, 16-17).[5]

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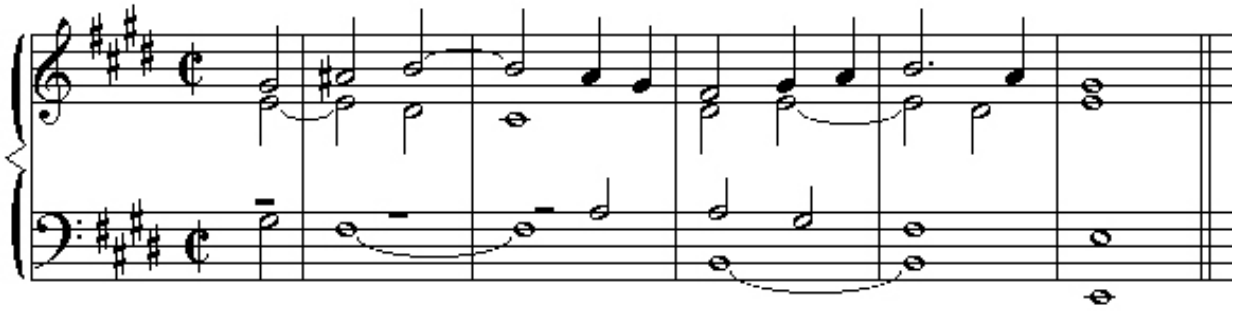
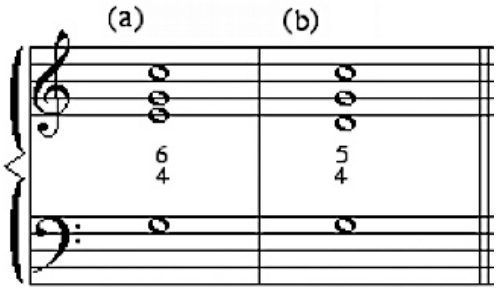
[4] The term "cadence galant" comes from Charles Cudworth (1949), who ascribed its use to the Neapolitan opera composers and in particular to Leonard Vinci. It seems likely, however, that the change was generational, as Daniel Heartz and Bruce Alan Brown point out ([2007]). Also, according to Lucinde Braun (2007), it can be found in French claveçin composers, among others, around the same time.

[5] The document is *Fundamenten des General-Basses*, ascribed to Mozart (but possibly written by his son) and first published in 1822 (Heartz and Mann 1969, 17).

Example 1: J. K. F. Fischer, Ariadne musica (1702), Fugue in E major, ending



Example 2: Mozart, Thomas Attwood Studies, p. 21: "accordo di quarta consonante" and "accordo di quarta dissonante"



It was this clichéd formula that Schenker eventually took for granted as a possible component of Urlinien: the cadential dominant figure appears without comment in *Free Composition*, Fig. 16 (the table of bass motions under the Urlinie from ^5). Following what appears to be the same line of thought, David Beach says of the progression with the cadential six-four that it "is one of the most common conventions in the tonal repertoire, so common one cannot avoid it or deny its important role, even at the *Ursatz* level" (1990, 98), and thus we are obliged "to accept this phenomenon simply because of its existence in musical practice" (82). In this way theory "remains sensitive to context," which Beach argues "is the only viable approach one can possibly take to musical analysis" (82).[6]

Scale degree ^6 and the rising line

For the rising line, the treatment of scale degree ^6 is crucial. With multiple examples, Jeremy Day-O'Connell (2002) has surveyed the changing role of this note. For it later history, he describes what he calls the "classical ^6" as a subtle expressive gesture, or more overtly as a signifier of the pastoral, in eighteenth-century music, then recounts nineteenth-century

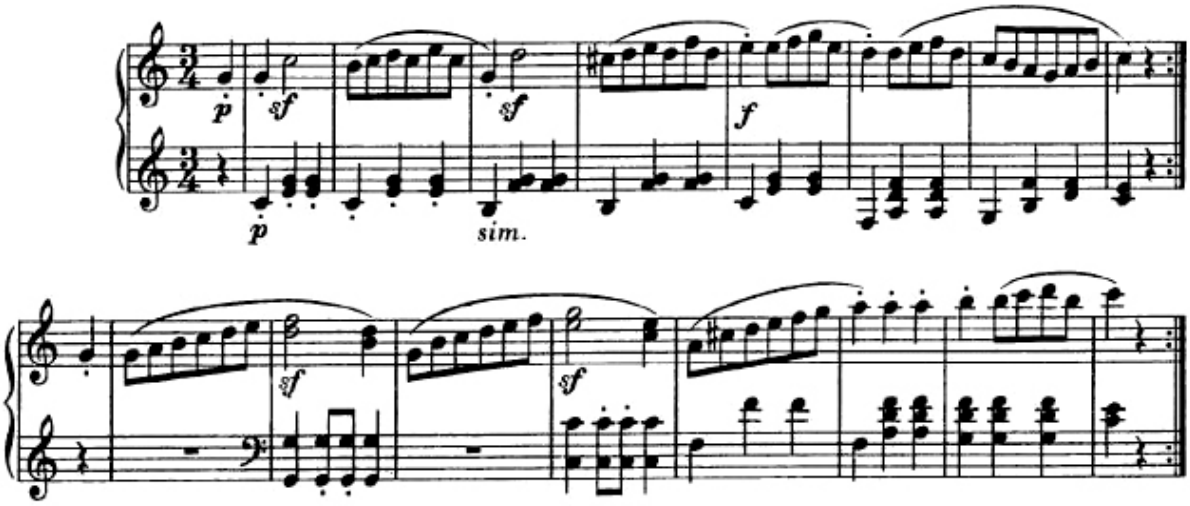
[6] As Allen Cadwallader points out, this approach "unfortunately leaves the 'apparent conflict' [between theoretical model and analytical practice] unresolved," to which he offers an explanation in the fact that "scale degree 3 in a 5-line has a dual nature: it is the third of the horizontalized tonic triad, and it embodies the qualities of a passing tone" (1992, 187-88; his emphasis).

adjustments and extensions, in particular the direct ^6-^8 motion in cadences (mainly after 1850). Along the way, he observes that "6ˆ . . . became a veritable hallmark of the salon and ballroom styles; waltzes of Chopin and Strauss [for example] are peppered with these characteristic appoggiaturas on ^6 (again, over both I and V7), no doubt harking back to the spirit of folk-dance and the world of Schubert's Ländlers" (45-6).

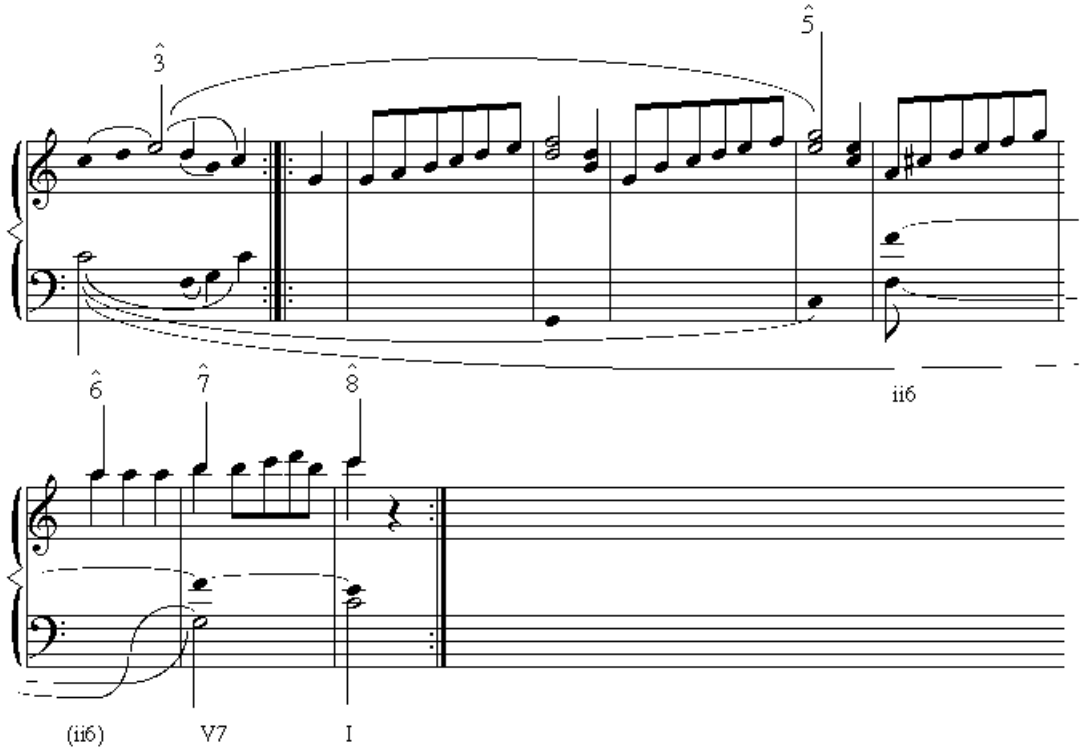
Day-O'Connell notes that one outcome of this fashion was "the evolution from ^6–^5 appoggiaturas to the use of additive harmony," that is to say, the direct use of the tonic chord with an added sixth, but we can also point to a similarly direct addition of a ninth over the dominant seventh chord and, more to my point, rising cadence gestures that carry the ^6 upward. It was often by refusing the downward resolution of the ninth over the dominant that the rising cadence was effected (Neumeyer 1987, 292), but other methods were employed as well, including some that position the ^6 firmly over subdominant-function harmony.

Beethoven was apparently one of the first dance composers to make direct use of a rising cadence. His *12 Deutsche Tänze*, WoO8, were composed only three months after he finished his counterpoint studies with Albrechtsberger, but the first dance follows an unexpected trajectory (see Example 3 and the graph in Example 4). It begins with a stepwise ascent from ^1 to ^3, a figure elaborated and harmonized with a highly conventional 8-10-10 voice-leading figure with the bass. Note that this ascent begins at the top of the space initially defined, G4-C5. The task of the second strain, then, is first to transmute this space to the fifth C5-G5 by transferring G4 upward to G5 (m. 12), then finally to take ^5 up as ^3 again moves down. Ramifications of rising line gestures had a significant impact on Beethoven's concert music, beginning as early as the Piano Sonata in E major, op. 14/1 (Neumeyer 1987, 298-301) and can be found scattered throughout the relatively small amount of dance music.

Example 3: Beethoven, 12 Deutsche Tänze, WoO8/1, score

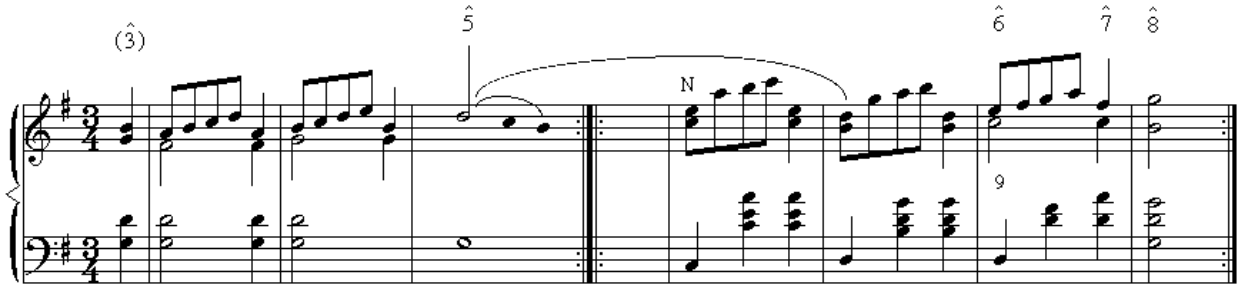


Example 4: Beethoven, 12 Deutsche Tänze, WoO8/1, analytical graph



Schubert used the rising cadence gesture occasionally in dances—there are at least sixteen instances—and, in more veiled ways harder to interpret securely, also in a few Lieder. A typical example from the dances is the last of the *Wiener-Damen Ländler*, D. 734/15 (see Example 5). Several others may be familiar from the theoretical literature, including *Valses sentimentales*, D. 779/13 (A major) and D. 924/1. Both are read from ^3 with covering progressions in the final cadence, the former by Carl Schachter ([1980]), the latter by Schenker ([1935], Fig. 46, 2)—more to the problem of the covering progression below.[7]

Example 5: Schubert, Wiener-Damen Ländler, D. 734/15, analytical graph

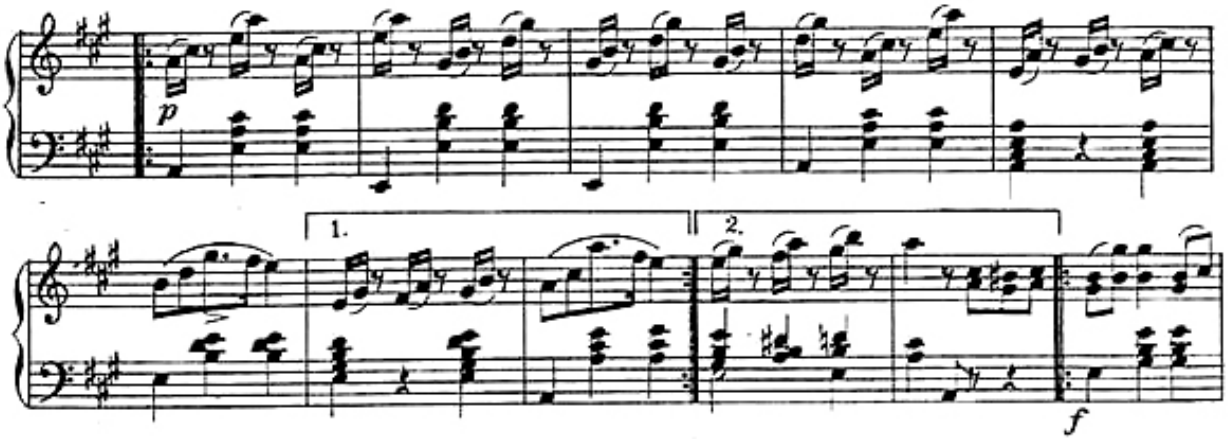


[7] Salzer (1962, 203) mentions another Schubert waltz: *Valses sentimentales*, D. 779/2; also see commentary in Neumeyer 1987, 292-93. An analysis of *Valses nobles*, D. 969/7, may be found in Neumeyer 1987, 284-86.

Josef Lanner, whose music was well-known to Schubert, used rising cadence gestures only rarely. A striking exception among his later music is the *Steyrische Tänze,* Op. 165 (1840), the best-known of his waltz sets now—if only because of the appearance of a warped version of its second number in Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. This set, in the familiar five-waltz format adopted by Viennese composers in the early 1830s, is remarkable for the number and clarity of ascending gestures and cadences. Rising cadences with register changes appear in both first and second strains of the first waltz. Rising figures underlie the first strains of numbers 2, 3, and 5, as well as the second strain of number 4.

Of all of these, however, probably only the third waltz (see its principal strain in Example 6) can be read securely in terms of a rising structural cadence. Lanner's protegé, Johann Strauss, sr., used the rising line in the same occasional manner as Schubert and Lanner himself. Curiously, though, the younger Strauss generation used the rising line only rarely, even in polkas: generally speaking, rising cadence gestures are more common in polkas than in any other repertoire before standards and show tunes of the twentieth century.

Example 6: Josef Lanner, Steyrische Tänze, Op. 165, principal strain of no. 3



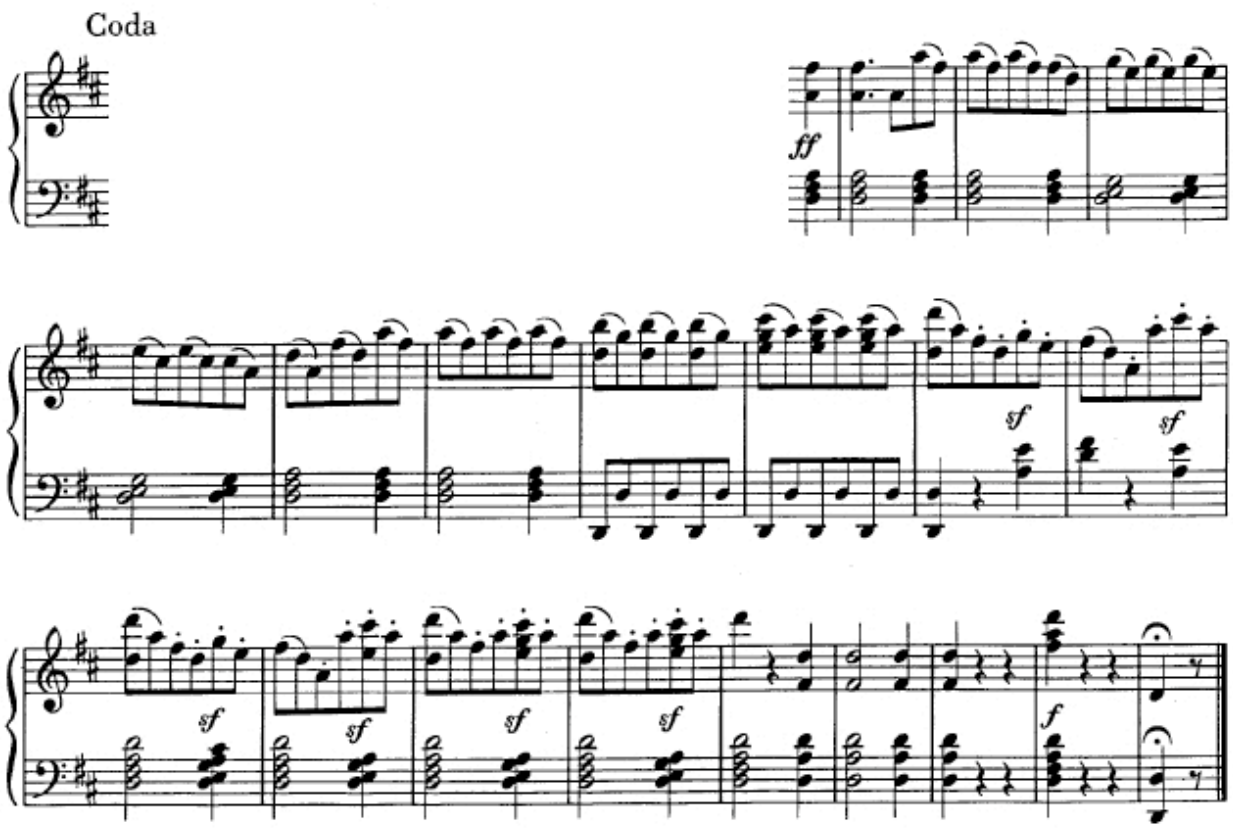
Reasons for the rising line

There is no probably no single reason for the increasing employment of rising cadence gestures. Certainly its novelty was a major factor: nineteenth-century composers looking for fresh expressive means might be expected especially to focus on alternatives to clichéd authentic cadence formulae (or at the very least on ways to veil them).

In dances, there are three additional possibilities. First, a rising cadence is aurally clearer, more sharply profiled, than one that descends, a quality that has practical ramifications for being heard in a ballroom or tavern, or for a pianist in a house where conversation is going on during the dancing.

The second possibility is that a rising gesture fits the physical profile of couple dancing better—not in the minuet, to be sure, but certainly in the waltz, schottisch, and, later, the polka, for these consist in couples moving along a line of dance while repeating short (usually two-bar) figures. (This applies especially to the patterns of the familiar, circular style of waltzing; the Ländler style was more complex, as it made use of a variety of arm figures, but these were normally also executed in two-bar or four-bar units). [8] The end of a dance under these circumstances could be somewhat ragged, as the music might well stop before the dancers realize it. A more sharply profiled rising gesture could be one antidote to that, the distinctive aural cue that told the lead dancer—or, if there was no *Vortanzer,* the lead in each couple—to bring the dance to an end cleanly with a final turn and a bow. This distinctive close is obviously related to the loud, rising figures that became common in the codas of instrumental pieces (including dance sets) as early as 1800: see Example 7 for a typical instance, the coda from Beethoven's Ländler, WoO15 (1801-02).[9]

Example 7: Beethoven, Ländler, WoO15, ending



[8] For an excellent, concise history and pre-history of social dancing in Vienna during Schubert's generation, see Litschauer and Deutsch 1997.

[9] The idea that composers might model their music mimetically on the movements of the dancers is discussed in detail, with respect to the waltz in McKee 2004.

Finally, in the schottisch and polka there is a possible mimetic source: it is difficult to counteract the waltz's strongly engrained dip (bend of the knees) on the first beat of each bar (indeed, a commonly found melodic emphasis on the second beat suggests displaced attention to the rise out of that initial dip), but the other two dances incorporate hopping figures that might be easily and appropriately reflected in a rise in the melody.

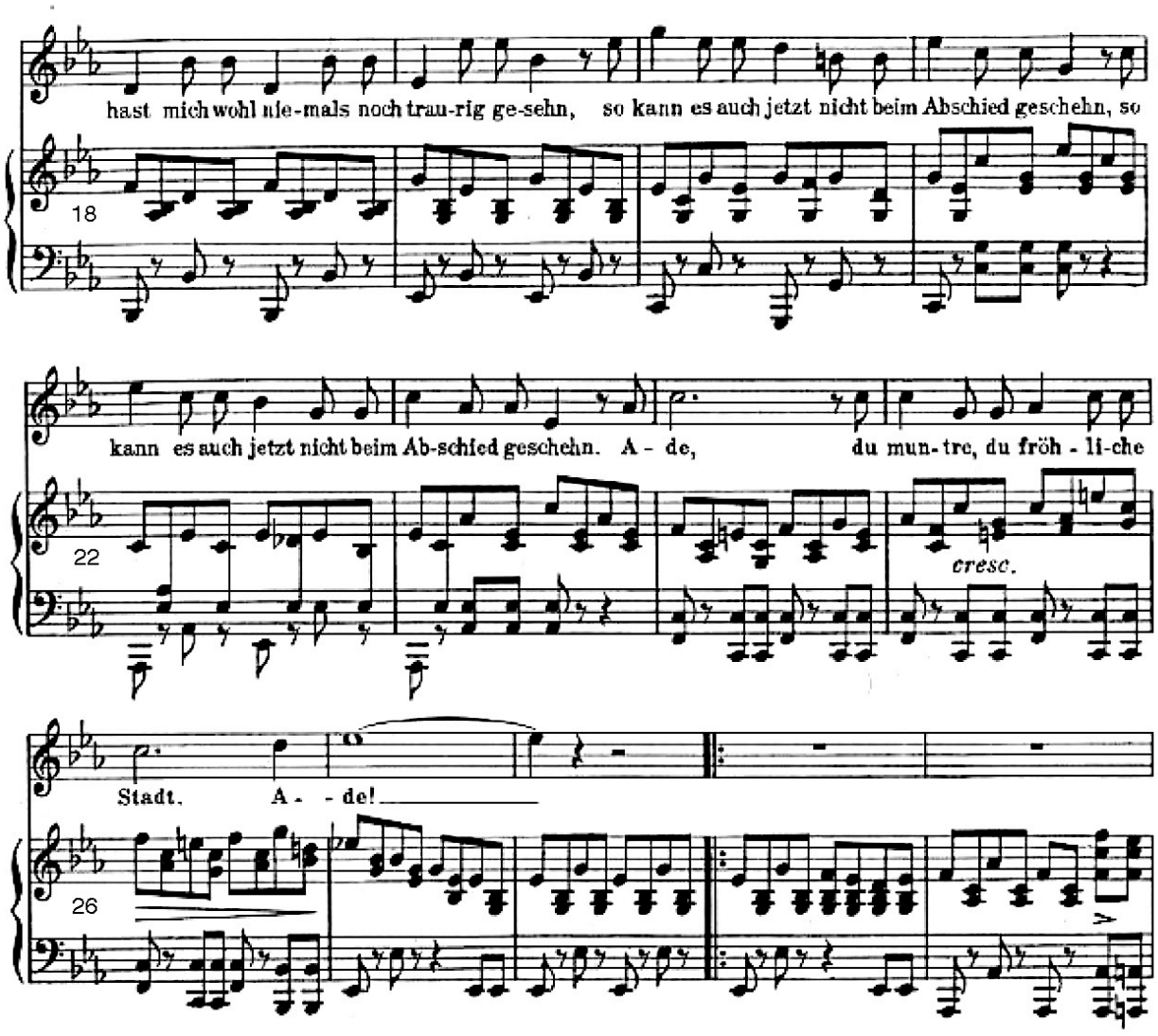
Text expression and the rising line

For Everett, it was text expression, whether direct or more abstract, that was at the heart of nineteenth-century composers' choices of alternatives, including the rising cadence gestures. Speaking generally of his Type B class, he says that "[i]n each of these cases, a normal 3- or 5-line is plausible, and is implied or perhaps even explicit in the accompaniment, but its exclusion from the singer's world goes to the core of the song's expression" (2004, 46). In one Schumann song, for example, Everett says that "an illusory vocal interrupted ^5 line seems to be countered by the piano's final ^3 line[, that is,] Schumann begins with a forest-ride *Gehenlinie* but ends up lost in a fifth-scale-degree daydream" (51).

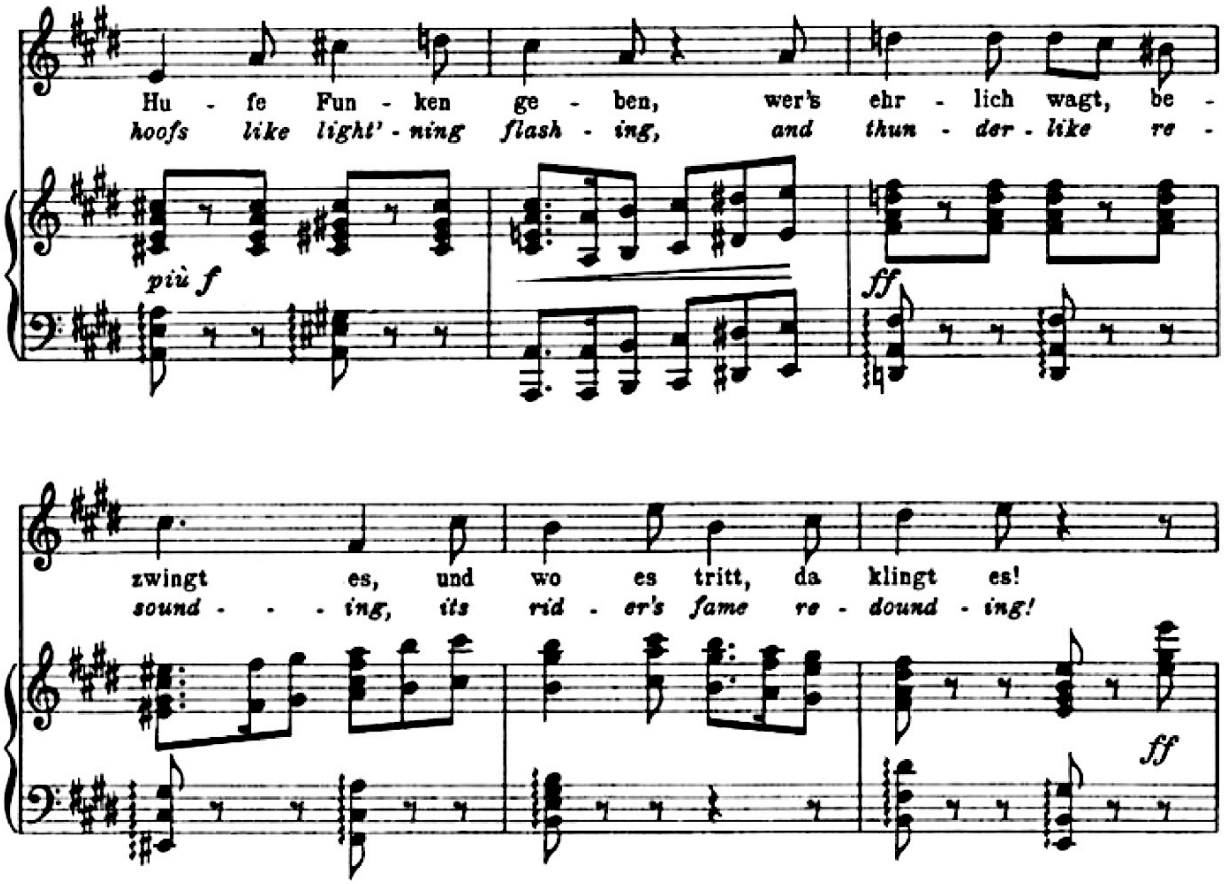
In the case of the rising line, however, Everett only speaks of "boastful bravado" in Hugo Wolf's "Lieber alles" (from the *Eichendorff-Lieder*) and straightforward text-painting mimesis—"the height of a yew branch as the platform for a dove's pale song"— in Henri Duparc's *Lamento* (52). Presumably similar to "Lieber alles," Schubert's "Abschied" is "eager"; its closing gesture is functionally almost identical: a final call to the city the rider is leaving for the last time (see Example 8). In "Lieber alles," it was a final bit of exaggerated imagining, as if the rider is throwing his arm in the air: see Example 9. In both cases, the piano carries a formulaic descent, leaving the stage, as it were, to the voice.[10]

[10] Carl Schachter also discusses text expression in relation to rising gestures in songs by Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms (1996, 328-30).

Example 8: Schubert Schwanengesang, "Abschied," mm. 18-30



Example 9: Hugo Wolf, Eichendorff-Lieder, "Lieber alles," ending (minus piano coda)



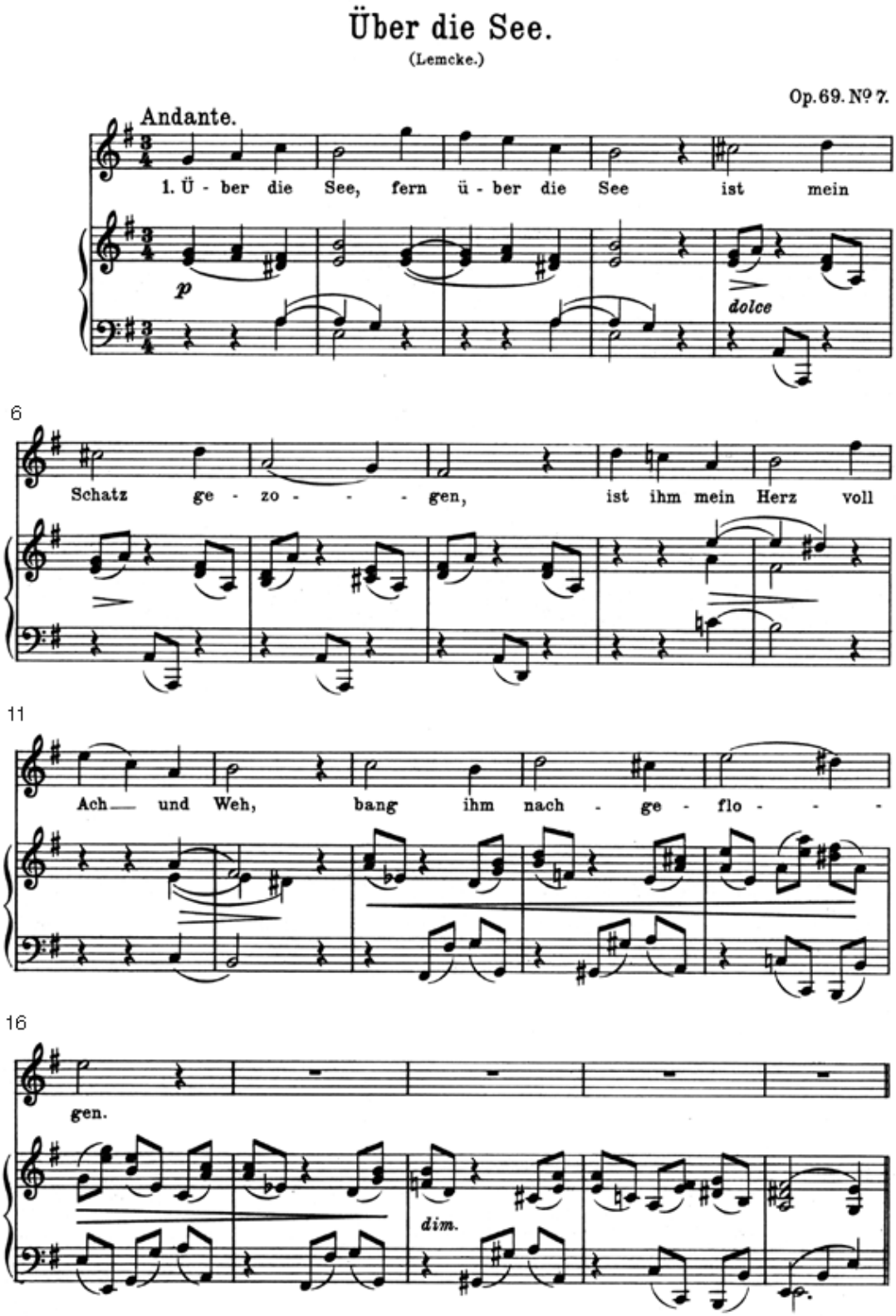
Everett mentions (55), but does not analyze, the Brahms song "Über die See," Op. 69/7, which is an excellent example not only of the mimetic treatment of the rising line but also of a typical ironic reversal but in this case effected entirely by the music.

The song is strophic, in three verses, where the first announces that a woman's lover has gone far away, over the sea, and, although fearful, her heart has flown after him (see Example 10, which shows music and text for the first verse).

Über die See, fern über die See,
ist mein Schatz gezogen,
ist ihm mein Herz voll Ach und Weh,
bang ihm nachgeflogen.

--(rough translation)
Over the sea, far over the sea,
Is my love departed.
For him my heart is full of woe,
In fear seeks after him.

Example 10: Brahms, "Über die See," op. 69/7, score for verse 1



This simple analogy between rising line and flying away is then subjected to a bitter change of meaning in verse 2, where the cadence is now completely at odds with the text ("sinket die Sonn, die Welt wird leer/muß mein Herz verzagen"), after which the cadence of verse 3, again mimetic, sounds like an upwelling cry of grief (". . .kann dich nimmer finden"):

Brauset das Meer, wild brauset das Meer,
Stürme dunkel jagen,
Sinket die Sonn', die Welt wird leer,
Muß mein Herz verzagen.

The waters are surging, wildly surges the sea,
The storms run darkly,
The sun sinks, the world is empty,
And my heart must despair.

Bin ich allein, ach, immer allein,
Meine Kräfte schwinden.
Muß ich zurück in matter Pein,
Kann dich nimmer finden.

I am alone, oh, always alone,
My strength is gone.
I must go back, in weakness and pain,
For I will never find you.

The rising line on the musical stage

Given what has been said above about both aural profile and text expression, it should not be surprising to find that the repertoire of the musical stage had considerable use for the rising cadence gesture. In opera, Rossini wrote cadences in such a way as to facilitate rising gestures, although only very occasionally did he exploit the opportunity in the structural cadences of arias or ensemble numbers. French composers influenced by him, however, certainly did, in particular Adolphe Adam and Daniel Auber, beginning in the early 1830s (several clearly formed rising lines appear already in Adam's first major success, *Le Chalet* (1834)).

In the following generation, Jacques Offenbach made frequent use of the rising cadence figure -- his *opéras bouffes* contain more such figures than any other works of the musical stage before the Broadway shows of Richard Rodgers. Four appear, for example, in Offenbach's own first major success, the 1855 version of *Orphée aux enfers* (for the four-act version of 1874 he added several more).

Indeed, Offenbach gives Eurydice a pair of simple, direct rising lines from ^5 in her first two numbers. The Eurydice of Offenbach and librettist Hector Cremieux is herself Other, but not the exotic and distant Other—she is, instead, a recognizably contemporary woman frustrated

beyond endurance with her dull, self-absorbed husband and both energetic and unscrupulous in taking control of her sexuality. Her entrance number, a short strophic song, has a parallel not long after in No. 4, "La mort m'apparaît souriante," and it is the parallel that removes any doubt about her determined bid for independence of action (or so she thinks: it is during and just after No. 4 that she falls under the sway of Pluto).[11]

Both of these numbers are two-verse strophic songs, both concern decisions that Eurydice makes and actions she takes, and both end with rising lines from ^5 to ^8 in the structural cadence. If Offenbach has clearly mastered the device of the "halved arch" to end, literally, on a high note and generate applause for the singer portraying Eurydice, he also has clear dramatic and ideological uses for rising lines, as well. Perhaps in part because she offers these rising gestures so early in the opera's proceedings, Eurydice here conveys to us a sense of defying the natural[ized] order (while also calling attention to herself). In both numbers, her voice floats up from ^5 with a death-defying sense of height, which is not only freeing but even ecstatic (the latter is clearly the effect in No. 4, though that effect is ironic, as the very freedom of sleep that Eurydice celebrates in this song is the method by which Pluto gains power over her). In a context like this, the dead weight of patriarchal tradition and social acceptability has to be borne by the cadence galant and its relatives with strongly downward tending lines.[12]

Thus, the path covered was this: the strong clichés of the formula cadence inherited from earlier music seem to have suppressed rising lines during the eighteenth century, until its final decade, from which point the trajectory was that rising lines were used more and more often, starting in dance music—where there already was an older tradition to appeal to[13]—moving to dance-influenced instrumental concert music, and from there to opera, operetta, and solo song, while at the same time greatly increasing in frequency in the formulas of mid-nineteenth-century dance music. What this history suggests for the nineteenth century is that, even if one starts with the Romantic conception of the Other, one does not need to end there: the very idea of manipulating the received tradition of eighteenth-century practice for purposes of expression or innovation was itself pervasive throughout the later century.

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[11] In the 1874 version, "La mort m'apparaît souriante" is No. 6. In both versions, the song is the penultimate number in the scene (1855) or act (1874).

[12] David Lewin's commentary (2006) on the idea that "the transcendent musical voice must be a woman's voice" (271) is relevant here. In the latter part of this essay, associating patriarchy with priority to the bass (or fundamental), Lewin writes that

> A male voice, singing an octave lower, could not have the same kind of relations with the bass line, the presence or absence of fundamental bass activity, the derivation of "harmonic" verticalities from melodic motives, and so forth. The female voice is typically acoustically free of what we conceive as a functional bass line—whether continuo or fundamental bass—and that is less typically true of the male voice. (274)

[13] The contredanse, which rivaled the menuet in popularity throughout the eighteenth century, was particularly rich in rising cadence gestures in its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources.

Part II: Theoretical questions and analytical practice

Status of the rising line in Schenkerian theory

Given that the rising cadence gesture is mechanically possible in figured bass practice, and given the historical evidence that this gesture played an increasingly significant role (along with its sibling Others) in nineteenth-century music, it is reasonable to ask what the implications are for theoretical models and analytical practice. For Everett, the sibling Others are "overriding voices," or a class of "non-standard vocal procedure [that] takes precedence, both aurally and conceptually, over any normal fundamental line that may incidentally inhabit the accompanimental texture" (2004, 46). The special circumstance of text expression in songs allows one to adjudicate in cases "where various lines compete for attention," even if the three Urlinie forms retain priority when possible. Thus Everett can say that the rising line is "controversial" (29)—in relation to Schenkerian theory—yet also that he does "not know why the most orthodox would resist considering it a bona fide fundamental line" (51) because examples are found in the repertoire (even though he himself still consigns the ascending Urlinie to Type B status).

William Rothstein argues in a similar way. He confirms that, in his view, "a fourth-progression from ^5 to ^8 may span an entire composition" (1991, 306) but immediately qualifies that statement: "for this reason alone, the ascending progression must at least be assigned to a deep level of the middleground." His reasoning is that "virtually always, . . . the ascending fourth-progression is counterpointed by a descending linear progression from ^5 or ^3." Once again, in the adjudication process between the lines involved, "it is probably best to assign such a three-part counterpoint to a deep layer of the middleground rather than to the background, and to choose one of the linear progressions as superior in status to the other." Thus, like Everett, Rothstein does not reject the ascending Urlinie (he does not specify which of the linear progressions must be regarded as superior and therefore a component of the background), but, probably because the discussion of the rising line is really at a tangent to his main topic, he also does not offer an opinion about the priorities of background content.[14]

Daniel Harrison is more cautious. Following the model of Allen Forte's motivic analyses of music by Brahms, Harrison locates in a Reger Intermezzo (op. 45/5) a "large-scale motive α" that governs the principal form section as an ascending line ^5-^8 in G minor and, in its inverse, the transition/coda material (see Example 10, which is Harrison's example 1 [1991, 63]). Unlike Everett and Rothstein, however, Harrison is unwilling to admit that this "surrogate structure" might act as a fundamental line, but the only reason he gives is that "a structure such as motive α would not be accepted by an orthodox Schenkerian as a proper background" (64).

Whether as a Type B line, a member of a three-part counterpoint in the deep middleground, or a surrogate structure, the ascending line clearly can occupy early stages of prolongation in a

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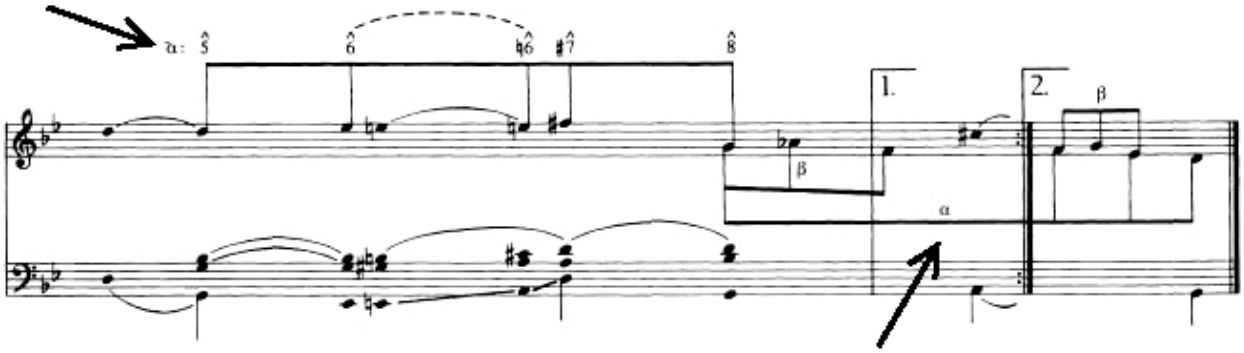
[14] Matthew Brown, on the other hand, rejects the rising line but accepts the idea of an essential three-part counterpoint in the background (2005, 75).

Schenkerian or Schenker-inspired reading.[15] Judgment about the status of the ascending line does not so much depend on the shape of the structural cadence (which is likely to be obvious, otherwise one would never raise the question of a rising line in the first place) as it does on the principal prolongation. Schenkerian analysts overwhelmingly distribute the fundamental structure across a piece as a single extended and elaborated [prolonged] note, followed by a stepwise descent in the final or most important cadence. The security of the background status of gestures in the final cadence, then, depends on how that initial, extended prolongation is interpreted.

Example 11: Daniel Harrison's reading of Reger, Intermezzo, op. 45/5; some information (measure numbers, theme groups, etc.) deleted, arrows added



Example: Brahms, "Über die See," Op. 69/7

An example will help to clarify this point. Let us look again at Brahms's "Über die See" (score in Example 11). The opening gesture in the voice (three of its four notes being doubled in the piano) outlines the space ^3-^5 and sets up either of these pitches as possible background structural tones: in Example 12a, an initial ascent leads from G4 to B4; in Example 12b, ^3 is established immediately and the line leads to a cover tone ^5, which in turn is suddenly leapt beyond in order to couple the ^3 with G5. The symmetries of the melodic gesture mimic repetitions in the text—"Über die See, fern über die See"—and establish a motif of inversion that, as we have seen, plays out through the entire song in the sharp contrast of desire and despair.

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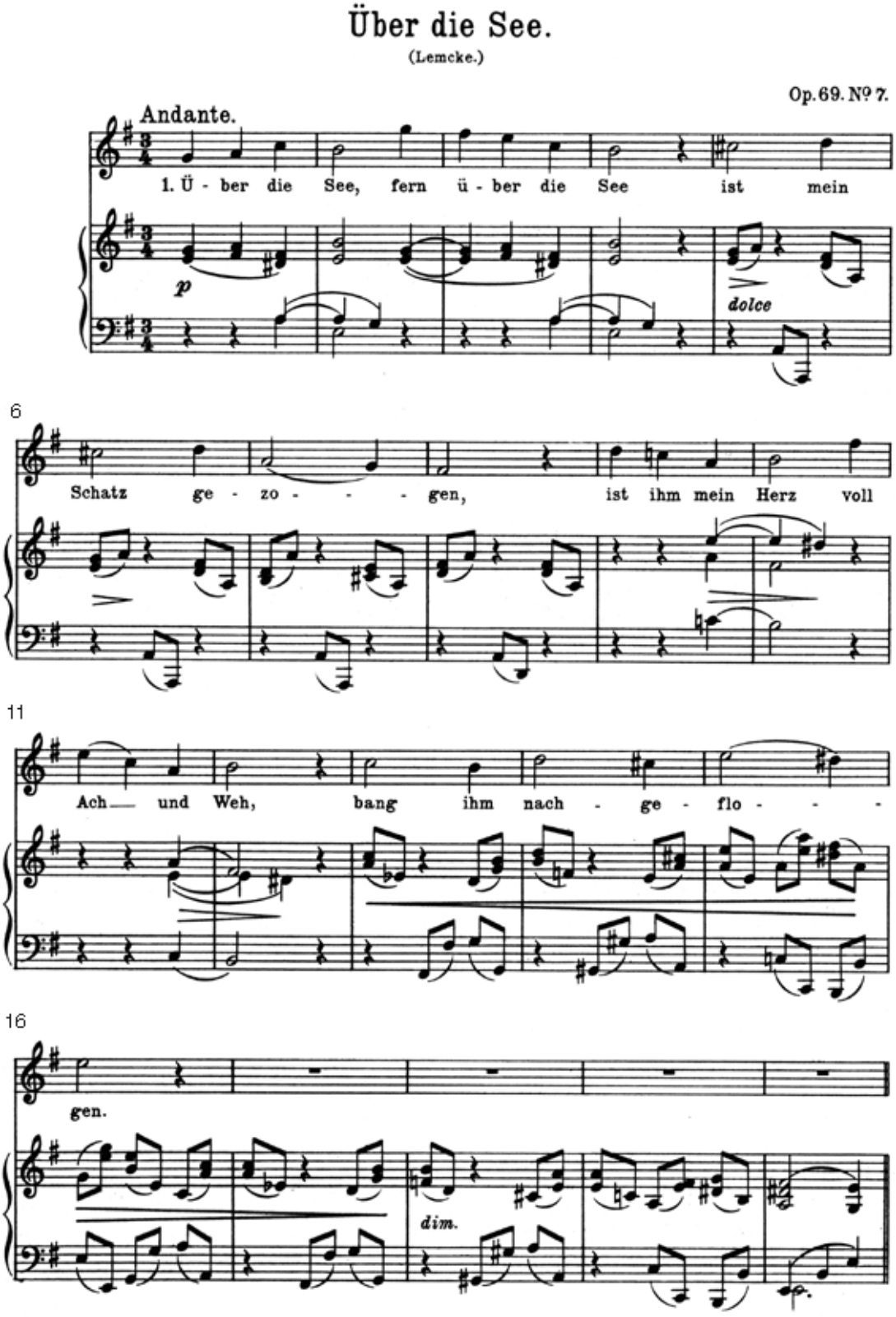
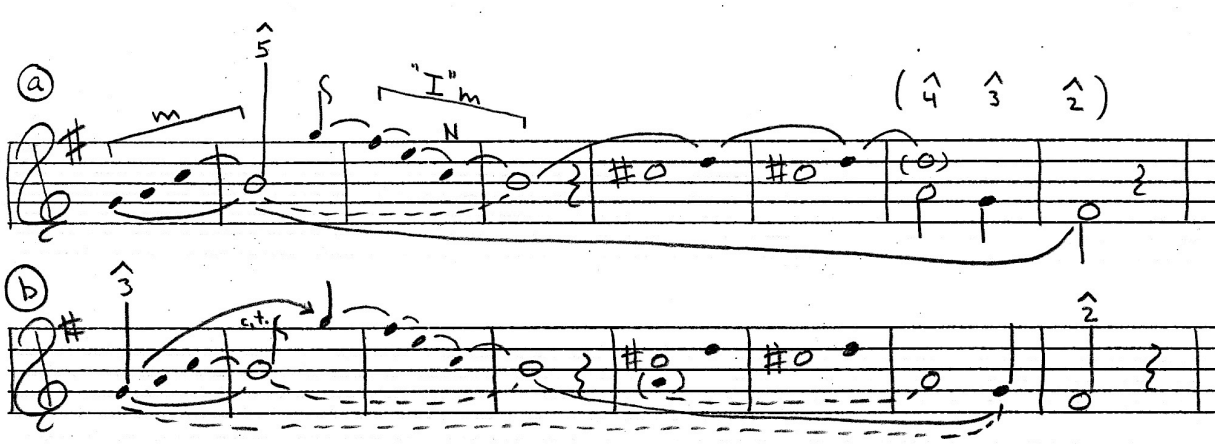
[15] Schenker includes the fourth among the intervals of tonal space in the mid-1920s (see [1926]), but in *Free Composition* he specifically rejects it with the old theoretical objection to the fourth as dissonant because it arises "secondarily" in the overtone series (that is, without the fundamental or one of its octaves as the lower note). The same general historical argument that validates the cadential six-four as a background component can be used to put aside this objection, as well. Also see commentary on Schenker's rejection of the fourth in Neumeyer 1987, 279-81.

Brahms, "Über die See," op. 69/7, score for verse 1, reproduced for reference



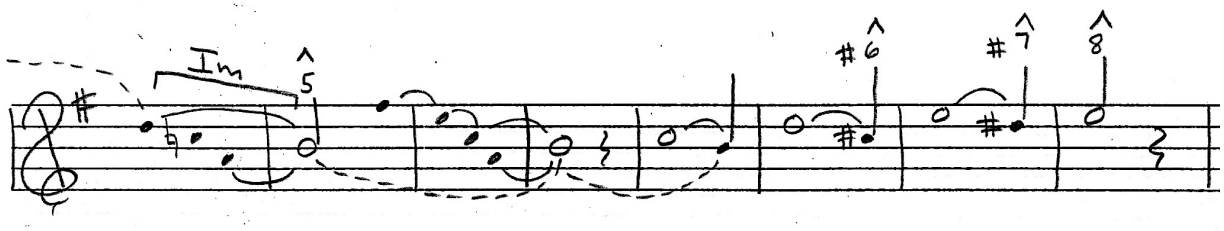
The initial melodic motive *m* is quickly given again in an incomplete inversion, marked as "I"*m* in Example 12a, and the continuation works out the mirroring patterns even further through an old-fashioned (folklike?), modal rise through ^#6 to ^7 (over VII) paired with a diatonic descent to ^2: the fall through the register above B4 is now balanced with a rise in that space, and the initial rising figure (motive *m*) in the space below B4 is paired with a falling line. In the reading from ^3 (Example 12b), this motivic and registral play is less obvious, but it has not disappeared: it now operates within the space of the coupled octave, divided as the third G4-B4 and its inversion, the sixth B4-G5. Beneath this, a ^3-^2 motion frames the entire eight-bar unit, supported by cycle-of-fifths harmony, E-A-D (not shown).

Example 12: Brahms, "Über die See," op. 69/7, two readings of the voice in mm. 1-8



In the first half of the verse, then, we have Everett's dilemma plainly before us: the prolongation of ^5 is involved directly and continually with text expression, but the prolongation of ^3 is simpler and situates essential harmonic motions more elegantly in the design. In the second half, however, a complete diatonic inversion of *m* brings D5 back down to B4, and this ^5 is launched unmistakably upward towards ^8 (see Example 13)—the piano coda provides the balancing descent.

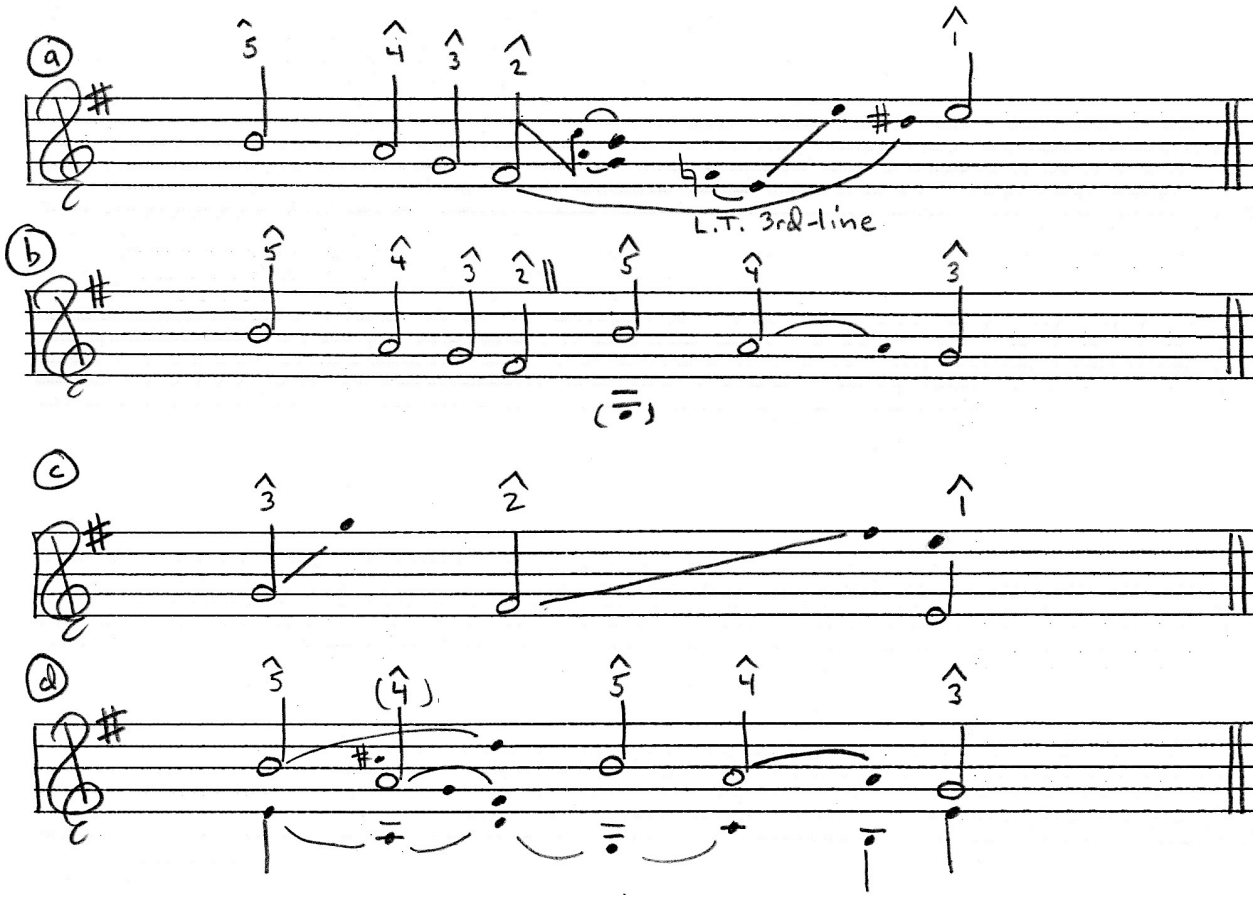
Example 13: Brahms, "Über die See," op. 69/7, reading of the voice in mm. 9-16

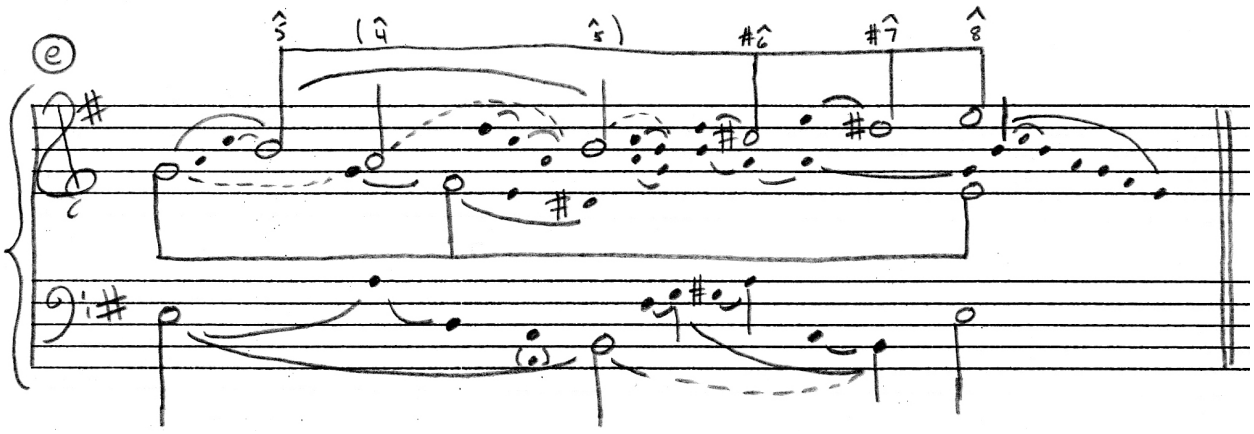


Obvious as this may seem, it is not the only possibility. Example 14 gathers five others:

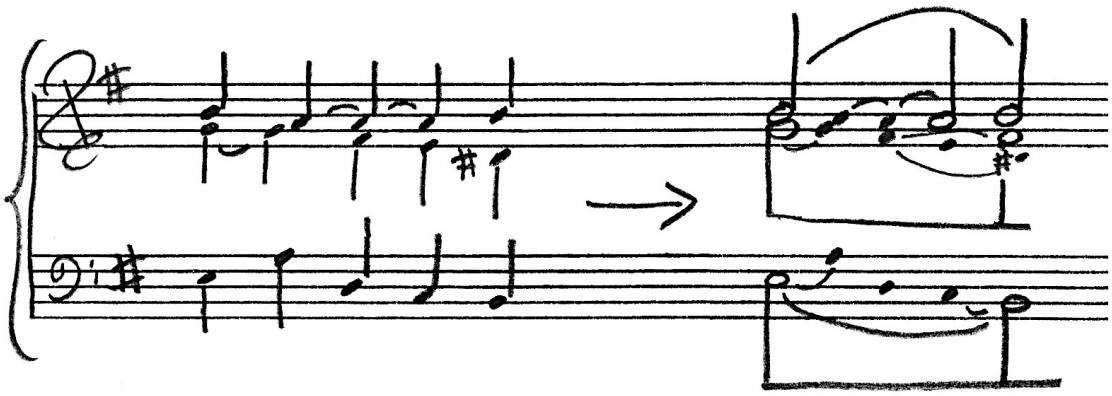
(1) in Example 14a, ^2 is prolonged through the second half till the cadence by means of a fairly elaborate leading-tone third-line;
(2) in Example 14b, the ^5 is regained over III (in m. 14) but can only descend to ^3 in the cadence (this incomplete line is another of Everett's Type B backgrounds);
(3) in Example 14c, the leading-tone third-line is assumed (not shown) but the coupling works itself out consistently throughout by means of the piano's upper-register F#5 (m. 15) and E5 (m. 16);
(4) in Example 14d, the third as middleground motive is worked out in what would probably be another Type B background;
(5) in Example 14e, the neighbor note figure from Example 14d is combined with the rising line and this entire upper voice is paired with the line from ^3 (Example 14c) in an example of Rothstein's three-part counterpoint. The upper line would seem to be at a disadvantage, except that the awkward lower neighbor note (A4) would be demoted in a "purer" reading of the background (the voice leading for this is worked out in Example 15).

Example 14: Brahms, "Über die See," op. 69/7, five options for background/first middleground





Example 15: Brahms, "Über die See," op. 69/7, correction of the middleground for the beginning of option e (Example 14e)



Part III: Background and theme

On theme

The six potential backgrounds for "Über die See," with my commentary, offer different summaries of what the song "is about" with respect to layers of harmonic voice-leading structures and (potentially at least) their relations to text expression. In their meta-discursive role as abstract melodies, fundamental lines are like themes, not so much in the usual musical sense as in the meaning of theme in linguistics and literary interpretation during the two middle quarters of the twentieth century (but also, informally, even into the present).[16]

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan puts it this way in an astutely argued but very pragmatic essay: "Theme, as everyone knows, is what the literary work is about" (1995, 9). In *Madame Bovary,* for example, it might be "the fragility of love" or—a slightly longer formulation—the fateful consequences for the protagonist of the assertion that "romantic ideas are inadequate for everyday life" (9). Although it is possible to conceive of theme in terms of authorial intention, generally it has been used as the summary or abstract of a reader's "'putting together' or reconstruction" of hierarchical patterns of meaning "from discontinuous elements in the text" (14). In these terms, then, "Themes are labels of the highest order, standing (as it were) at the top of a tree-like hierarchical structure. A similar tree-like construction can be used to describe the bringing together of various themes under one major or governing theme" (14). In the same way, the process of reduction eventually "constructs" the background in a Schenkerian analysis.

Or, if one conceives linear analysis in generative terms, then the theme is a "global signified." However, "[t]o view theme in this way is to anchor it in structure . . . but also to raise the problem of the inevitable leap between structural description and the formulation of its correlate in terms of meaning" (16). This is exactly the problem that Everett's article is concerned with, and Rimmon-Kenan comes to much the same solution ultimately: "Instead of viewing theme as the homologue of the common structural denominator emerging from all (or most) aspects of the literary work—which it sometimes, but not always, is—one may think of it as homologous to the predominant structural aspect of the work under consideration" (17). Among her examples: "if narrative ambiguity is the governing structural principle of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, its thematic correlate may be the uncertainty of human knowledge" (17).

In terms of song analysis, we can say that "Type A" themes (with all their implications) might apply, but, if they conflict with text expression or are too weakly represented, then Type B, C, or D themes could apply instead (or, conceivably, even in addition). Karl von Lemcke's poem "Über die See" has a narrative component: a woman's heart, full of sorrow and woe ("Voll Ach und Weh"), flies over the ocean seeking her lover but is forced to turn back by storm and darkness; finally she despairs of ever finding him ("Kann dich nimmer finden"). Thus, thematically, the poem is about the loss of love or, alternatively and more specifically, about

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[16] I have written about the analogy of background and theme in Neumeyer 2009, 2011, and 2015.

the physical and psychological effects of the loss of love. To state this in a way parallel to Rimmon-Kenan's example: if the governing structural principle of "Über die See" is visualization of a narrative of loss—desire in the flying, emotional turmoil in the dark sea, final loss in the empty world—its thematic correlate is the intensity of the physical and psychological effects of loss of love.

Before we look more closely at the six Urlinie options for "Über die See" in relation to this thematic reading of the poem, we need to consider again the role of the background in linear analysis.

For Schenker himself, the analyses derived from his theory might also be listeners' reconstructions (or, one step removed, guides for performers), but the emphasis is squarely on correct reconstruction of authorial intention, since the background is not "merely" thematic: it is also thetic, an assertion of truth value. Schenker intended his analyses to be rhetorical demonstrations of how tonal processes are infused from above with a synthesis that points to the universal. Thus, tonal processes are not merely syntactical; rather, the syntactical points toward, and is infused with, the unique synthesis whose node, whose fulcrum, is the Ursatz and its Urlinie. These latter do nothing less than permit God to speak to the world through creative genius ([1935], xxiv, xxiii, 3, 158-9). Arnold Whittall has put the point elegantly:

> No writer on music seems more committed to the principle of autonomy–of "immersing oneself in the internal workings of a piece of music as though nothing else in the world existed"–than Heinrich Schenker. . . . [His] interpretation of compositions as integrally hierarchic and organic (at least when in the hands of the masters) can nevertheless be regarded, not as "purely musical" in the most literal sense, but as culturally determined by factors outside and beyond music itself. Schenker may have resisted analogies between compositions and either literary or social contexts, yet he was committed to a far wider frame of reference than that provided by aesthetic and cultural elements–that of the cosmos, no less: "Between fundamental structure and foreground there is manifested a rapport much like that ever-present interactional rapport which connects God to creation and creation to God. Fundamental structure and foreground represent, in terms of this rapport, the celestial and the terrestrial in music." (2001, 77)

Or, in Nicholas Cook's formulation, "Schenker predicated his theory of levels on the chord of nature, the major triad; the *Urlinie* takes the shape it does, and in consequence generates the middleground and foreground that it does, because that is how God has made the world" (1999, 220-1).

Thus, questioning the specific canon of background forms would necessarily constitute criticism of the belief system underlying the theory. In an evolutionary path now well-rehearsed in the literature, Schenker's deeply ideological model was shifted toward an historical account of tonality (the first major document in that shift was Felix Salzer's doctoral dissertation in 1934), a shift that was much more agreeable to American scholars and coincided

nicely with a general shift in interpretation away from a focus on the author (and meta-author, in Schenker's case) toward an emphasis on the text and its analysis.

This tendency, explicit in writings of Milton Babbitt, Allen Forte, Arthur Komar, and others in the 1950s, papered over the gap between Schenker's theory as an historical narrative of tonality and Schenker's own claim that tonality was exclusive, that his theory showed who knew tonality and who didn't, who was a genius and who wasn't. For the style studies that followed in the 1970s and 1980s, Schenker's account, as supplemented by his followers, provided an adequate historical narrative of the "tonal system" of western European music, and therefore one looked along the axis of the prolongational levels for significant innovations that fuel change (even as the three stable forms of the Ursatz models represent resistance to any such change).

Three awkward problems quickly arose. First, in the interpretive practice arising out of and supporting this historical account, any composition correctly written within the traditional rules of major-minor tonality can be analyzed using Schenker's method—it is largely the skill (or the biases) of the interpreter that locates unique qualities of genius in the work and the intersubjective acceptance of a community of interpreters that accepts or rejects the composition at hand as part of the canon. In the process, composer after composer has found his or her way into the post-Schenkerian canon, from Liszt and Wagner to Duparc and Fauré.

Second, acceptance of the historical master narrative was largely uncritical, in part perhaps because the focus on unity in rhetorical presentation of analyses (in order to make an analysis convincing) tends to inhibit self-critique. Despite his attention to the Other forms, for example, Everett does not ask seriously whether those forms might signal failures in the music at hand or perhaps even something problematic in the very idea of the Romantic fragment. (Not to mention larger questions such as, Why is tonality given such a prominent place in interpretation?) The end result is a curious "flattening out" of the interpretive narrative, which seems to be in line with an equally flattened out historical frame in which Schubert (1797-1828), Duparc (1848-1933), and Richard Strauss (1864-1949) all share the same concerns and priorities.

Third, it became apparent that the analytical system was not sufficiently developed to deliver completely predictable, replicable results: thus, it could not in fact support an objective or scientific account of tonal history. As a result, through the 1970s and 1980s emphasis shifted toward interpretation, "correctness" now being measured by how "convincing" or "musical" a reading was. Thus, for example, David Beach could assert in ending the passage cited earlier that "Schenker's legacy to us is not a theory of, but an approach to, musical analysis. Whatever rules exist in his 'theory'—and I would prefer to think of these as guidelines rather than prescriptive rules—are themselves derived from musical practice" (1990, 82). On the other hand, the way was opened for two sharply different responses: rendering linear reductions consistent and replicable (Lerdahl and Jackendoff) and establishing a critical, "anti-unity" position (this began in the early 1980s but accelerated in the 1990s with Kramer, Dubiel, and others).

The problems cited above were never overcome—and in fact they run parallel to criticisms of thematic reading during the same period (as do some of the responses).[17] Under the circumstances, for the question he was exploring, a compromise like Everett's (between the ideological demands of the theory and the disciplinary or cultural demands of a historical master narrative) makes sense, but I would insist that one also recognize contingency in—that is, be aware of the urge to essentialize—both the shapes of the background and the historical narrative itself. A theme is like an abstract or a governing idea; it is both description and interpretation (an ambiguity that is both strength and weakness), and, insofar as the emphasis is on the reader's reconstruction of a piece, the task at hand is not locating the truth or even constructing the best possible analysis, but the best possible analysis that fits the preconditions of the task, the reader's goals. In other words, we need continually to pay attention to the rhetorical goals of thematic reading.

Even in the most traditional Schenkerian analysis practice, the existence of three options for the background (plus a number of configurations in the first middleground) already gives a sense of how alternatives contribute to maintaining this desirable, self-conscious mode of analysis. For our reading of "Über die See," we have six options (and could even add more, such as an octave-line or a third-line from the upper octave (rather than coupling the lower octave))[18] but these should evaluated in two different ways: first, in terms of the priorities of the pitch design considered independently, and, second, in terms of the priorities of pitch design and text expression.

The complete descending line from ^5 (Example 14a) and the line from ^3 coupled in the first middleground (Example 14c) can represent, as they do for Everett, the benchmark of (eighteenth-century) tradition against which the deformations/transformations of the nineteenth century can be set: in the Urlinie, diatonic motion moving consistently downward by step through an interval of the tonic triad and ending on ^1. More broadly, the Urlinie forms encapsulate Schenker's worldview, with its insistence on the eighteenth-century Viennese sacralization of strict counterpoint and its bias for a top-down hierarchy that manages the unity-in-diversity of a clearly ordered "upper world" and the "chaos of the foreground" (in much the same way that the Hapsburg monarchy ruled the collection of nationalities in the Austrian Empire). The differences between Exx. 14a and c are small—the size of the motion in the first half of each verse—but significant, in that the line from ^5 emphasizes the modal turn to VII where the line from ^3 largely bypasses it. The line from ^3, of course, also enables a consistent octave coupling in a way that would have been much more difficult with the line from ^5.

The two examples of incomplete lines from ^5 (Exs. 14b & d) can be considered together, since they differ only in their first middleground components. It is easier to think of these partial descending lines in connection with text (Everett mentions questions and unrequited love (2004, 57)), but considered simply in terms of pitch design, they are disruptive: either the

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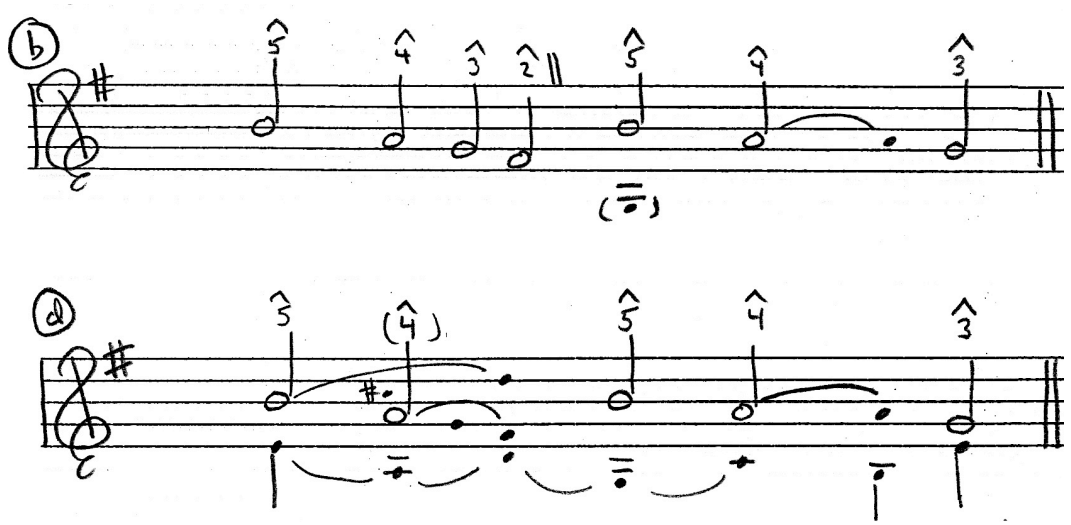
[17] Russell Brown (1993) offers a concise summary of the use and criticism of theme in literary interpretation. For extended defenses of thematic reading, see Sollors 1993 and the essays in Bremond, Landy, and Pavel 1995.

[18] Also see fn19 below, for the suggestion of a background that assigns individual "verse backgrounds" to each of the song's three verses.

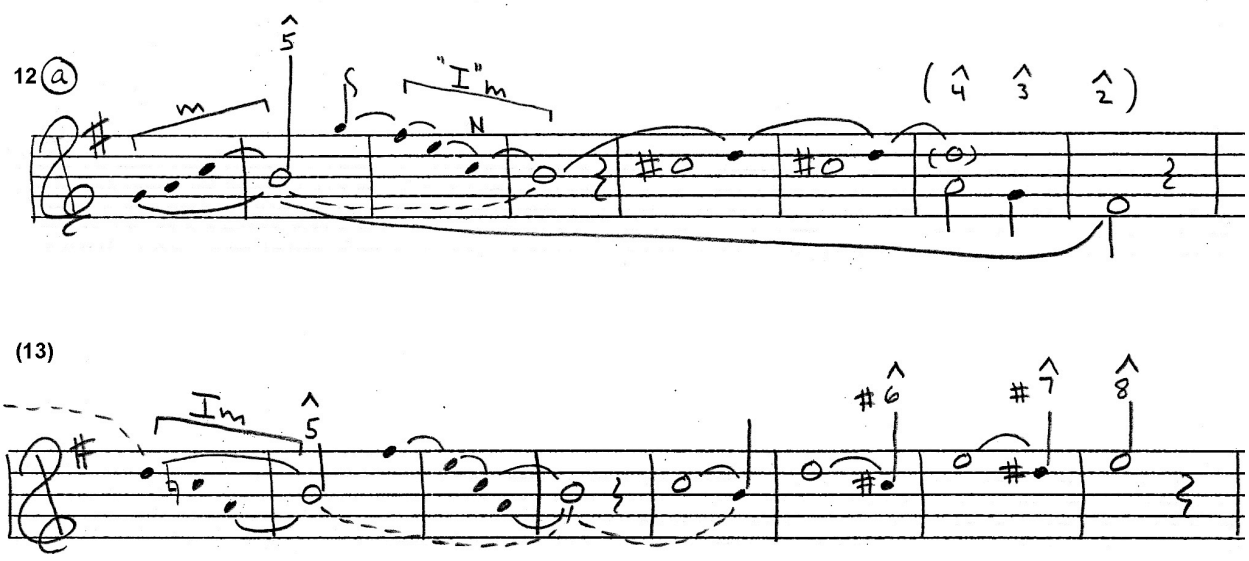
composition at hand is a fragment or else it deliberately avoids the conventional formulae of closure. The version in Example 14b highlights the former option with its parallel gestures: the interruption of a line from ^5 followed by its incomplete closure. Example 14d, on the other hand, is unconventional in both its components.

Examples 14 b & d reproduced for reference:

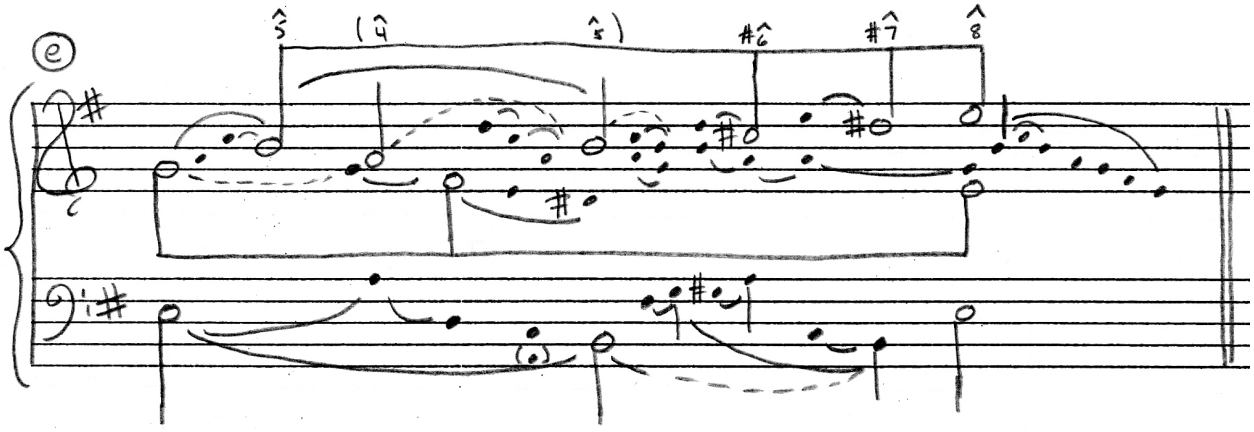


Compared with the incomplete line from ^3, the rising line from ^5 (Exx. 12a and 13, or the upper voice in Example 14e) is much more respectful of convention, in that it is tied to the cadence formula and it reaches ^1. Schenker's insistence on descent as natural ("To man is given the experience of ending, the cessation of all tensions and efforts. In this sense, we feel by nature that the Urlinie must lead downward until it reaches ^1" ([1935], 13)) contradicts his oft-repeated analogy of the course of music to that of a stage play, which after all might well end, in tragedy, with a moment of high intensity (such as death of the protagonist), or, in comedy, with the elation of the formation of the couple or with the high spirits of looking forward to "happily ever after."

Examples 12a and 13 reproduced for reference:



Example 14e reproduced for reference:

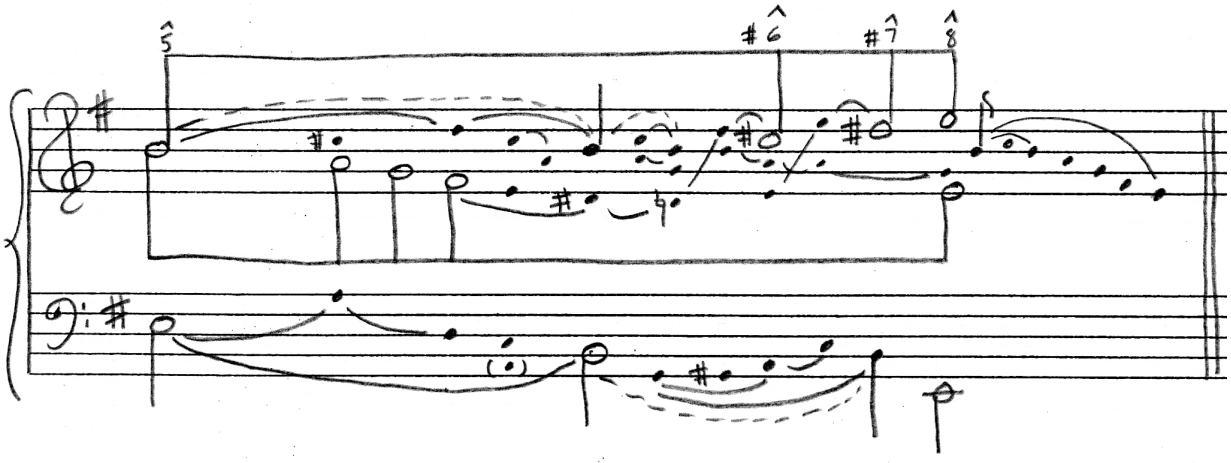


If we now read pitch design in relation to text expression in "Über die See," the descending line from ^3 sets up a hierarchy that favors the piano. Only in the framing notes of mm. 1-8, the initial G4 and the concluding F#4, is the voice also implicated. Otherwise, the obligatory register is consistently occupied by the piano, and the sense that emerges from this is priority to harmonic progression and a basic voice-leading grid (Rothstein's "imaginary continuo" (1990, 94)) that contrasts with the foreground-middleground "filigree" of the voices above the level of the obligatory register. One might try to justify this reading by reference to an implacable fate (the harmony is simple in its basics and moves forward through its limited space without consideration for anything else), except that the first eight measures do not

correspond: the unusual position of the leading-tone seventh chord in mm. 1 and 3 and the modal turn to VII in the entire second phrase both undermine any sense of an implacable harmony. Even without this problem, it is hard to reconcile the directness and intensity of the poem's expression with this "downgrading" of the voice part. As a thematic expression, the line from ^3 is incoherent.

The incomplete lines from ^5 are plainly unsatisfactory for a similar reason: there is nothing fragmentary, unsettled, or provocative about this song or its text. The strophic form itself imposes a regular temporal order, and by the poem's third line we are alerted to a fearful mood ("Voll Ach und Weh") and then drawn into movement (". . . ihm nachgeflogen") that will lead to tragedy, according to the topos of lost sailor narratives. Both second and third verses end with confirmations: "my heart must despair" and "I will never find you." As thematic expressions, the incomplete lines from ^5 are also incoherent.

Example 16: Brahms, "Über die See," op. 69/7, reading in three parts with two complete five-lines



The remaining three background shapes—^5 with a rising line, ^5 with the usual descent, and three-part counterpoint where ^5 rises and ^3 falls—are all plausible in the first instance because of the motif that combines a stop on ^5 with a significant word, its repetition, and its rhyme: *See/See/Herz/Weh*; *Meer/Meer/Sonn/leer*; and *allein/allein/zurück/Pein*. (All of these, of course, are also tied to a musical motif, motive *m*.) Indeed, to maximize this aspect of the song's text expression and at the same time to maintain the distinctive gesture of the cadence

(which the piano follows in its general ascending shape), I prefer to combine two lines from ^5, one rising, one falling, in a three-part counterpoint (see Example 16 [above]).[19]

[19] This poem could appropriately have been set in the manner of a ballad, that is, with different music for each verse, but the narrative, after all, is quite limited, and the relatively small amount of text would have suggested a much more prominent role for the piano in the form of interludes. In other words, the setting and its expression would have been radically different. But, even in its strophic form, as we have seen, there are substantial mood shifts from verse to verse, and it would be reasonable to ask whether each verse should have its own "background," so that three, possibly different "verse backgrounds" would ultimately come under the control of a thematic "song background."

Conclusion

I have attempted to place both the ascending fundamental line and Everett's problem of the relation of text and background shape(s) within a theoretical and interpretive context consistent with the traditions of linear analysis and, as much as possible, specifically with Schenkerian analysis. With respect to the ascending line, we may acknowledge the point that David Carson Berry makes about preferences: "Thinking about melodies in terms of their general contours, one commonly perceives descent (especially if by step) as more musically conclusive motion, while ascent is thought to increase tension" (1999, 6).

And it is certainly true that the statistics of structural cadences in European and American musics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries support such a general statement. On the other hand, it misrepresents the music of the nineteenth century, especially, to move from statistical dominance to an essentialist claim about descending figures linked to such metaphors as gravity, release of breath, physical relaxation, ground (or grounding), etc.[20] As the history of cadential figures shows, the cadential function itself may have remained stable over the centuries, but the musical materials that fulfil that function have changed as stylistic priorities have changed. It seems plain from the evidence that the erstwhile dominant/subordinate relation of (stereotyped) descending line and boundary play loosened dramatically, resulting in a "democratization" of structural upper-voice relations that was certainly one of the healthier developments of the nineteenth century.

With respect to the question of stable Urlinien and the sibling Others, by making a generational link to thematic analysis in literary studies, we can understand the Urlinie as analogous to theme and, through that, can recognize that Schenker's rhetoric of the three descending forms is unduly restrictive if the goal is to interpret a composition's voice-leading grid hierarchically and thematically. If we are to expand the available forms-as-themes, it also makes sense to look for simpler, more fully abstract structures that could be understood to precede the Urlinien and their relatives, out of which a wider range of forms-as-themes could develop coherently. In that case, it may be best to resolve Schenker's tonal space or diatony back into the intervals available in tonic-triad elements of the overtone series (not forgetting that the unison is also an interval). Intervals in a proto-background of fundamental and upper-voice interval could encompass the unique horizontalized tonal spaces of Everett's Type B forms (and, with appropriate adjustments, the Type C and D forms as well).

If Everett's dichotomy between the Urlinie and the Others seems consistent with nineteenth-century aesthetic notions, it also seems likely that we can go well beyond that in writing a historical narrative of tonality.

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[20] In this connection, I cite again David Lewin's discussion of Schoenberg's criticism of these metaphors (2006, 274-9). It should also be noted that rising figures are possible in the prolongational reductions of Lerdahl (2001).

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